

Henry C. Hansbrough and the Presidential Election of 1916

Leonard SCHLUP

HENRY C. HANSBROUGH, UNITED STATES SENATOR from North Dakota from 1891 to 1909, played an important role in the presidential campaign of 1916 in North Dakota. In the crucial contest that year, two able men competed for the presidency in an election that carried international implications due to the war in Europe. Hansbrough, a Republican, supported President Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat, over the GOP presidential nominee, Charles Evans Hughes, a former governor of New York and liberal Supreme Court justice. Hansbrough headed the Wilson Independent League of North Dakota, and in that capacity he wrote a series of articles, published in North Dakota newspapers, on why the voters should return Wilson to the White House for a second term. Because of the importance of the election in American history and because of Hansbrough's years of public service in the Senate, these essays, hitherto overlooked by historians, merit consideration. They reveal a great deal about Hansbrough as a politician and help to fill in a neglected aspect of the 1916 campaign.

Born in Randolph County, Illinois, in 1848, Hansbrough was the son of Elias and Sarah Hagen Hansbrough, natives of Virginia who relocated to Illinois from Kentucky in 1846. Hansbrough's grandfather, Enoch Hansbrough, had been one of Daniel Boone's compatriots in Kentucky. The future senator attended the local district schools, and his mother supplemented this education by teaching him at home. During the summer months Hansbrough worked the corn fields of his father's farm. Family responsibilities prevented him from serving in the Union army during the Civil War. At age nineteen, Hansbrough, the eldest of six children, accompanied his parents on their move to California to seek gold. They traveled by way of Nicaragua. From St. Louis the Hansbroughs sailed the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico to reach the central American nation, which they crossed with difficulty by mule back, steamer, and small boats.¹

Upon his arrival in San Jose, California, in 1867, Hansbrough worked as a

The author is an independent scholar living in Akron, Ohio, and has just completed a book on Adlai E. Stevenson.

printer and learned to set type. Later he became interested in reporting and editorial duties and in a few years achieved the position of managing editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, but the severe strain of night assignments forced Hansbrough to resign after ten years. In 1879 he moved to Baraboo, Wisconsin, where he once again engaged in journalism. He remained there for a short time before relocating in 1881 to Grand Forks, North Dakota, where the next year he started the *Daily News*. There he became involved in a bitterly fought mayoralty campaign between Captain M. L. McCormick, a veteran Red River boat operator, and Captain Alexander Griggs, another river steamboat pioneer. Hansbrough supported McCormick, who won the contest.²

After surveying the region, Hansbrough decided in 1833 to settle in Devils Lake, North Dakota. He immediately founded a weekly newspaper, the *Devils Lake Inter-Ocean*. An ardent Republican, Hansbrough entered politics, using his newspaper to promote his political ambitions. He served as mayor of Devils Lake from 1885 to 1888. In the latter year he attended the Republican National Convention at Chicago and supported the presidential nomination of former Senator Benjamin Harrison of Indiana. Hansbrough also served as a member of the Republican National Committee from North Dakota from 1888 to 1896. In addition, he pursued many business activities to increase his social and economic standing in the Devils Lake community.

Hansbrough was an avowed continental expansionist who recognized the political necessity for the admission of new states to the Union. He applied his editorial abilities in that direction. Hansbrough especially championed the project to divide the Dakota Territory and admit two states. In 1889, when an act of Congress granted statehood to North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Washington, Hansbrough felt vindicated for his years of tireless efforts in bringing his ideas to fruition.³ North Dakotans rewarded Hansbrough by sending him to the United States House of Representatives, in which body he served from 1889 to 1891. "My election to the lower house is assured," he notified President Harrison's private secretary shortly after the electoral results.⁴

In 1891, following his election by the state legislators, Hansbrough took his seat in the United States Senate. In this capacity he represented North Dakota for the next eighteen years, twice winning reelection. Several characteristics marked his years in the Senate. First, he sought to encourage the development of the nation's resources. Second, he sponsored pure food legislation. Third, the senator endorsed the principle of tariff protectionism to guarantee North Dakota farmers, including wool growers, safety from foreign competition and a more stable farm economy. Fourth, he encouraged American economic and political expansionism overseas in areas such as Puerto Rico and the Philippine Islands. Finally, Hansbrough vigorously fought for patronage for his state as he skillfully played the game endemic to Washington life.

Hansbrough's reputation in Washington reached its zenith during the presidential administration of Theodore Roosevelt from 1901 to 1909. The North Dakotan had been an early supporter of the New York governor for the Republican vice presidential nomination in 1900, and when an assassin's bullet placed Roosevelt in the White House in 1901, Hansbrough became a frequent guest at the executive mansion. For the most part, he loyally defended the president's program, favored Roosevelt for reelection in 1904, and, as a member of the Senate Finance Committee, suggested various courses of action.⁵ Hansbrough admired the president's "unswerving fidelity to principle" and his "restoration of...moral and business principles."⁶ He also encouraged Roosevelt to seek the presidential nomination in 1908, but when the president refused to consider a third term, Hansbrough wholeheartedly endorsed Roosevelt's designated successor, Secretary of War William Howard Taft, who won the election.⁷

Although Hansbrough enjoyed a warm relationship with Roosevelt for many years, he subsequently denounced him publicly over the issue of huge corporations and the president's handling of giant monopolies under the antitrust legislation. The issue that caused their permanent break involved an antitrust suit that Hansbrough wanted the president to initiate against the International Harvester Trust. As a result of his opposition to the formation of monster monopolies and the dangerous power wielded by such corporations, Hansbrough favored a plan to proceed with the prosecution of the Harvester Trust for violation of the provisions of the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. He expected positive results from Roosevelt and from Attorney General Charles J. Bonaparte, but nothing developed from Hansbrough's demand for an investigation of the Harvester Trust during Roosevelt's final year in office. Because the president thwarted that effort, Hansbrough, an antimonomopolist, concluded that Roosevelt was guilty of collusion and disloyal to those who had supported him as a reformer.⁸

The news of Roosevelt's intention to run for another term in 1912 on a third-party ticket infuriated Hansbrough, who backed President Taft for reelection. Unable to conceal his anger, the former senator addressed an open letter to Roosevelt on August 20, 1912.

It is the plain truth to say that yours was the protecting and fostering hand that saved ... trusts from prosecution during the seven years of your administration.... While proclaiming yourself as the champion of the masses, in reality ... you are a foe to be most dreaded by the people.⁹

Following the defeat of Roosevelt and Taft for the presidency in 1912 and after the presidential inauguration of Woodrow Wilson, a New Jersey Democrat, Hansbrough published his thoughts about Roosevelt and Taft. His book, entitled *The Wreck*, vehemently attacked Roosevelt and George W. Perkins, a financier and banker who took a leading role in the formation of the International

Harvester Corporation. Hansbrough condemned Roosevelt for "an imperious disregard for the law," his "inordinate vanity," for changing America's "republican institutions to an oligarchy of legalized monopoly," and for his "peculiar hypnotic ability" in making people believe that he could do no wrong, thereby putting them into a "state of mental intoxication."¹⁰ "Throughout his long lease of power," Hansbrough opined,

he stirred the popular imagination until it became a ferment of uncontrollable passion.... By winking at criminal infractions of the law, Roosevelt had managed not only to increase the country's ills but to leave the impression that they were due to the corrupt practices of indefinite persons and to forces so potent that he had been unable to subdue them. The people were impatient for the realization of the reforms which he had artfully outlined but never secured.¹¹

He added: "From 1901 to 1909 regnant monopoly passed from infancy to giant-hood practically unmolested," describing those years as a "demoralizing reign."¹² Hansbrough detested "the aggressive arrogance of the foremost monopolists" and referred to Perkins, a partner in the J. P. Morgan firm, as "the arch organizer of trusts."¹³ The North Dakota politician considered it highly inappropriate for such an industrial titan as Perkins to carry the Progressive party banner of social and political justice or to be Roosevelt's right-hand man. Although Hansbrough reserved his harshest criticism for Roosevelt and Perkins, others, including Taft, did not escape his wrath. While he never questioned Taft's sincerity, Hansbrough thought that the former chief executive not only exhibited poor judgment in making appointments but also failed to understand the role of party leader.¹⁴

Hansbrough's repudiation of Roosevelt signaled another episode of his political independence and maverick status as a politician. This trait characterized Hansbrough's career in politics and contributed to his defeat for reelection in 1908. Yet it also made him a powerful force in North Dakota whose reputation went well beyond the borders of his state. Beginning in politics as a product of the political machine headed by Alexander J. McKenzie, North Dakota's forceful Republican boss, Hansbrough eventually turned against McKenzie, claiming that he and his cohorts had "disgraced the state and debauched the ... people."¹⁵ Although Hansbrough's renunciation of McKenziesm demonstrated the senator's free spirit, his independence also took other forms. He championed the cause of free silver as a monetary standard but endorsed a sound money candidate for president, William McKinley, in 1896 and 1900, over the Democratic apostle of silver coinage, William Jennings Bryan.¹⁶ In view of his denunciation of Roosevelt, McKenzie, and Perkins, Hansbrough's endorsement of Woodrow Wilson in 1916 probably came as no surprise to those who knew him well and

remembered his record of political unpredictability and his intense hostility to trusts.

The Republican debacle in 1912 and the progressive reforms of the Wilson administration impacted on Hansbrough's thinking as he prepared for the presidential election of 1916. He had long before converted to midwestern progressivism and shared little in common with stalwart conservatism in his state or party. A supporter of competitive capitalism and liberal measures for social, economic, and political reform, the former senator rode the wave of progressive change that characterized that period in North Dakota and American history. Hansbrough committed himself to what he considered to be the historic values of the Republican party. His theme was entrepreneurial capitalism, even though he did not use that term. Hansbrough believed in ownership, improvement, and upward mobility; his conviction was that the core of the Republican party should appeal to all the people.¹⁷

In addition to domestic matters, Hansbrough weighed foreign policy and the personalities and qualifications of the presidential aspirants in reaching his decision in 1916. Wilson's steady hand in shaping foreign policy to keep the nation from becoming embroiled in the European war, which had begun in 1914, persuaded Hansbrough that on this issue Wilson also deserved a second term. The final factor for Hansbrough occurred when the Republicans nominated Hughes on the third ballot at their national convention in Chicago on June 9.¹⁸ The stage was set for Hansbrough's reemergence into North Dakota politics.

The Democratic and Republican presidential campaigns differed fundamentally in 1916. Ably led by Vance C. McCormick, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, the Democrats adopted the strategy of presenting President Wilson as a progressive and a man of impeccable integrity who opposed war.¹⁹ They conveyed a positive image of their candidate to the voters. Hughes, by contrast, had to walk a careful line during the campaign so as not to antagonize either the progressives or conservatives in his party. "He dare not have opinions or he would be sure to offend some important section of his following," commented Wilson.²⁰ As a result, Hughes, failing to define his campaign, set a negative tone. Resembling an Old Testament prophet with his austere and upright manner, Hughes seemed more preoccupied with cosmic issues than with waging a constructive canvass.²¹ He was too narrowly partisan, displayed political insensitivity by snubbing certain progressives who belonged to his fragile coalition, and concentrated too heavily on small technical details in his disappointing campaign speeches.²² His address at Fargo, North Dakota, on August 10, illustrated this handicap when he dwelled upon "profligate waste" in the Wilson administration.²³ Hughes's mistakes, combined with financial problems and intraparty rivalries, proved troublesome for William Lemke, a Fargo lawyer who chaired the Republican State Central Committee in 1916 and later served in Congress.

On September 12, 1916, Hansbrough announced, through the Democratic National Campaign Committee, that he intended to support President Wilson for reelection and take an active part in the campaign. "One of the reasons why I cannot vote for Mr. Hughes," he said,

is because I cannot conscientiously take orders from Theodore Roosevelt and George W. Perkins. I know them of old. I heard the Grand Forks address of Mr. Hughes and noted the fact that his tour of the Northwest was stimulated by the active presence of the President of the Great Northern Railway [Louis W. Hill, son of James J. Hill]. I am for Wilson because I believe in the principles of Abraham Lincoln rather than a man who represents the special interests and privileged classes as distinguished from the true democracy of the country.²⁴

Hansbrough's decision to align himself with Wilson put him squarely opposite his good friend, former President Taft, who favored Hughes.²⁵

A few weeks later, on October 3, Hansbrough accepted the presidency of the Wilson Independent League for North Dakota. "I regard it as a duty to accept the presidency of the league. In no other way could I render greater service to my country," he said.²⁶ Hansbrough also pledged to tour the state on behalf of Wilson's candidacy.

Hansbrough's decision to head the state's Wilson Club met with an instant response from numerous North Dakota Republicans committed to Hughes. The *Forman Independent News* bitterly chastised the former senator. The paper editorialized:

It is doubtful if the old has-been can accomplish much in the face of the strong sentiment prevailing for ... Hughes.... In our opinion, Hansbrough is playing a rather despicable part. He has been only too well recognized and taken care of by the Republican party in the past and his present "soreheadism" is considered a joke.²⁷

Hansbrough accelerated his crusade for Wilson during the last two weeks in October. The vigor and determination he showed reminded voters of his earlier days in politics, and he spent long hours addressing groups and writing letters. In many respects, he outperformed and outdistanced younger incumbents running for office. On October 17 Hansbrough debated United States Senator Porter J. McCumber, a Republican supporter of Hughes, at New Rockford. It was Hansbrough who challenged McCumber to the debate. At first McCumber declined the verbal duel but eventually agreed to speak on why Republicans should vote for Hughes. Hansbrough entitled his speech "Why a Republican Should Support Wilson."²⁸ Hansbrough devoted his address largely to an attack on Roosevelt and to a defense of the policies of the Wilson administration. One

newspaper reported that "the star entertainers" had enlivened the presidential campaign and that "the show was worth the price of admission."²⁹

In addition to the debates, Hansbrough visited various North Dakota cities in October and spoke to several groups. On October 2, he conversed with a group at Grand Forks to counter the pro-Hughes speeches given earlier in the city auditorium by United States Senator Knute Nelson of Minnesota and Republican Congressman Henry T. Helgesen of North Dakota.³⁰ At Mandan, North Dakota, on October 28, Hansbrough appeared at the athletic club hall, where he assailed Roosevelt as the dangerous power behind the throne, denounced Hughes, and eulogized Wilson for his eight-hour law, Federal Reserve Act, and his administration in general. Hansbrough pointed out that Wilson had kept the country out of war.³¹

On October 30 Hansbrough addressed an open letter to Hughes that appeared in several newspapers. Describing himself as a Wilson Republican, the former senator queried Hughes on a number of matters. Hansbrough mentioned Hughes's "littleness" with regard to his conception of the presidency, criticized the GOP nominee for exercising poor judgment on issues not in conformity with the best interests of the people regardless of party affiliations, and attacked Hughes for belittling the integrity of the campaign by claiming that everything Wilson had done was wrong.

This was the feeling that prompted me, after listening to one of your speeches in this campaign, to declare myself in favor of the reelection of Mr. Wilson. But for the fact that you are seeking an office, wouldn't you cast your vote as I intend to cast mine—for the man who has done his level best and succeeded in many big things, rather than for the man who ignores the bigger things and deals vaguely with the little things?

Hansbrough asked.³²

Hansbrough's debates and tours constituted only one part of his political itinerary. He also voluntarily wrote newspaper articles during the autumn of 1916 to promote President Wilson and his program of financial reform. Using the proceeds from his wheat crop in Ramsey County the previous year, the former senator, claiming membership in the Lincoln-McKinley school of Republicanism, peppered certain newspapers with political advertisements called "Senator Hansbrough's Page." They were usually addressed to "My North Dakota Friends" or to "My Republican Friends." He reminded voters that he was not a candidate for any office and that lack of time and his advanced age necessitated the adoption of this means of communication. While directing his attack against monopoly and special privilege, Hansbrough managed to criticize Hughes for hurling "muddy missiles" at Wilson and also denounced Roosevelt for his "wicked abuse of power" and for having broken his promise to prosecute the

Harvester Trust. In one article, Hansbrough remarked: "Never before in all its history has the Republican party been so completely under the domination of evil influences. And at no time in the past has it ever been so devoid of issues." Maintaining that "Wall Street interests and the corporations" formed the basis of Hughes's candidacy, he urged North Dakotans, regardless of political affiliations, to vote for Wilson and keep a "courageous and progressive" president in the White House.³³

Hansbrough's epistles contained relevant information putting into perspective the main issues of the 1916 campaign. They remain a valuable but overlooked source. Hansbrough ably discussed major matters in these voluntary contributions unhampered by the stigma of being paid for by any political organization. He praised Wilson for taking the tariff question out of politics, and condemned the "oligarchy of incorporated greed" and "the shackles of legalized privilege." In one particular essay, Hansbrough wrote:

On the one hand we have the combined energies of corroded wealth striving for the success of Candidate Hughes. On the other hand the myriads of men upon whose industry the parasite class are girding their loins for the supreme test. In their hearts they are for President Wilson.... So it is, too, that entrenched privilege is beset by the dynamite of public opinion, and that with the sinking of the sun on November 7th, we may look forward in confidence to the complete demolition of the fortified works of fraud and deceit. As a Republican who is free to vote his convictions without fear of party punishment, I am proud of the privilege of taking part in the assault.³⁴

The venerable North Dakotan treated voters across the state to a virtual daily dose of his columns. His down-to-earth approach appealed to many. "In years past you and I have had occasion to discuss the public questions together," Hansbrough told the people like a kindly father, adding that "our talks were more or less informal and always sincere and to the point."³⁵ He did not deviate from that approach in 1916.

Hansbrough asserted that Perkins was in frequent contact with Hughes during the campaign. In this assessment he was correct.³⁶ Hansbrough also labeled Perkins as "the solicitor of funds" for the Hughes campaign. "With Roosevelt and Perkins his principal supporters," he protested,

I challenge any man anywhere to show that Wall Street interests and the corporations in general are not solidly back of Judge Hughes's candidacy. Hence it is that, for their own protection, the people owe it to themselves and to future generations to vote for Mr. Wilson without regard to former party affiliations.³⁷

In another column, Hansbrough suggested that North Dakota voters

take the advice of one who knows the game as played at Washington and vote for President Wilson, who has crushed the Money Ring in Wall Street; who has given the country a non-partisan tariff commission, which will give you a business tariff instead of a partisan tariff. Elect Wilson, who has demonstrated his sympathy and sincere friendship for the toiling millions.³⁸

North Dakota newspapers closely followed the presidential campaign. The usual political biases appeared depending on the inclination of the newspaper. Hansbrough's columns did not appear in the *Cavalier Chronicle*, a weekly paper, edited by J. K. Fairchild, who endorsed Hughes. Fairchild contended in his editorials that the Wilson administration had been marked by extravagance and inhumanity. The *Devils Lake Daily Journal* countered with a ringing endorsement of Wilson. "President Wilson's record of service to the farmer, to the country [and] to humanity demands your support," exclaimed one political banner.³⁹ Another Democratic advertisement estimated that Wilson had saved farmers hundreds of millions of dollars. "The wisdom of Woodrow Wilson has brought financial freedom for the farmer."⁴⁰ On the other hand, a Republican newspaper, the *Jamestown Daily Alert*, described Wilson as a "meddler" whose administration "has been an orgy of bloodshed."⁴¹ In order to save the nation from war and shame, the paper urged the electorate to support "peace with honor" by voting for Hughes.⁴² The choice was between Hughes of "sterling integrity" or Wilson of "shifty opportunism."⁴³

People saw and read Hansbrough's messages in the newspapers, and these political essays probably persuaded some voters to favor Wilson. Without question Hansbrough had been a powerful figure in North Dakota politics in his day, and many still listened to the former leader who by 1916 had been out of the Senate for only seven years. Wilson also kept in touch with events in North Dakota, though no evidence exists that he and Hansbrough exchanged letters during the campaign. The president did write to J. W. Wasson, a resident of Velva, North Dakota, about the campaign. "The reason you give for supporting me," Wilson assured Wasson, "touches me very deeply, that you should feel when you see 'the boys and mother' together in your home circle that I have preserved the peace and happiness of the home. Such a feeling on the part of my fellow-citizens is a sufficient reward for everything I have done."⁴⁴

Among the North Dakota Democrats who expressed satisfaction with Hansbrough's activities were Frank O. Hellstrom and John Burke. They were two of the most prominent Democrats in the state at the time, considering the fact that the entire North Dakota senatorial and congressional delegation that year consisted of Republicans. Hellstrom, the warden of the state penitentiary, had been the unsuccessful Democratic gubernatorial nominee in 1912. Burke,

governor of North Dakota from 1907 to 1913, was the treasurer of the United States during the Wilson administration.

President Wilson won a narrow reelection victory on November 7, 1916. He received approximately 590,000 more popular votes than Hughes, but the electoral vote stood at 277 for Wilson and 254 for Hughes. It was a close contest in that the president garnered only eleven more electoral votes than the necessary number, and a shift of some 3,000 popular votes in California would have made Hughes the winner with 267 electoral votes, one more than needed for victory.⁴⁵ Wilson's triumph in North Dakota heralded the first time that the state went Democratic in a straight two-way presidential race. The president carried thirty counties in North Dakota, receiving 55,206 votes to 53,471 for Hughes. Most of the counties having sizable German-American populations favored Hughes.⁴⁶

A delighted Hansbrough took satisfaction with the outcome of the election nationally and locally. He concluded that North Dakotans had registered a strong statement that they were seeking economic and political emancipation from the East. In an interview with a Washington reporter, he provided his view of the election:

For ever so long a time we [North Dakotans] have been going to New York for almost everything, including our presidents.... Until Mr. Wilson came to our relief we also had to go to New York for our money.... The result is very gratifying to us.... If in the operation Harvester Perkins got singed a bit, it was because of his close proximity to Roosevelt. Where these gentlemen made their fatal mistake was (1) in nominating a perfectly innocent man as their candidate and (2) in sending him west to talk of things he knew very little about... Judge Hughes ...was the victim of untoward circumstances. What about the future of the Republican party, you ask? Under its present management it hasn't any future worth consideration.⁴⁷

The most decisive factors in the outcome of the presidential election were the peace issue and the president's success in winning former Progressives. The 1912 Progressive vote varied considerably from state to state in 1916. In North Dakota, Wilson captured 40% of the 1912 Progressive vote. Democratic success in 1916 had come on account of the party's promises of continued peace, prosperity, and progressivism. Hughes had criticized as weak the president's foreign policy toward Germany, but this attitude failed to ignite widespread support in North Dakota, a state in which farmers feared that the president was already taking too strong a stand in his negotiations with Germany. Hughes ignored this reality, and his appeals to superpatriotism camouflaged other issues, which cost him dearly. Near the end of the campaign, numerous GOP precinct committeemen in North Dakota were wearing buttons proclaiming their support of Wilson.⁴⁸

Other factors also contributed to the result. Basically, Hughes was not a good campaigner; he failed to develop domestic issues and seemed incapable of reaching the people in a personal way. Moreover, Roosevelt, who distrusted Hughes but detested Wilson, weakened the party's stand by his acerbic and flamboyant attacks on the president. Just as Roosevelt's radicalism in 1912 had paved the way that year for Wilson's triumph, so Roosevelt's continuing schism in 1916 helped Wilson to win a narrow reelection victory against the colorless Hughes. Finally, William R. Willcox, chairman of the Republican National Committee and manager of the Hughes campaign, was a poor politician. A former postmaster of New York City, Willcox could not match the Democrats. His shortcomings eventually impelled Perkins to assume much of the organizational effort in the East.⁴⁹ In the final weeks of the campaign Perkins intemperately attacked Wilson directly at the same time that Hansbrough was stepping up his activities in North Dakota for the president. In the end, Wilson consummated the union of the South and West that William Jennings Bryan had failed to accomplish in his 1896 presidential race. Moreover, Wilson polled more popular votes than he had in 1912, and he became the first Democrat to serve a second consecutive term as president since Andrew Jackson.

Various Republicans lamented their party's defeat in 1916. Former President Taft thought that "good luck" and "unblushing opportunism" had brought Wilson his success.⁵⁰ Hughes claimed to harbor no complaints or regrets, but he expounded on the difficulty of holding together diverse groups within the party. "It was a very difficult campaign—there were so many cross currents," he confessed to Taft.⁵¹ Yet the specter of defeat had haunted party faithful long before November. As early as August, a Minnesota Republican had astutely summarized the political dilemma and issued a warning. "I fear Pres. Wilson is stronger than our fellow Republicans think he is," he observed.⁵² Hansbrough would have agreed with that analysis.

Wilson's narrow victory gratified progressives, but a new era of reform failed to materialize in the United States. Conservatives continued to resist innovation. More important, the entry of the United States into World War I created a situation that discouraged new initiatives on behalf of domestic change. After the war, the nation, under President Warren G. Harding, settled back into a period of normalcy and conservative retrenchment, which characterized the 1920s.

After the presidential election of 1916, Hansbrough turned his attention to his own personal life while still keeping an eye on politics. Ill health, which plagued him throughout most of his life, compelled Hansbrough to seek different climates. The former senator lived in several places, including Virginia, Florida, and Washington, D. C. At St. Petersburg, Florida, he enjoyed a gradual return of health to the point that he could play golf by 1920. Eight years later he supported Democratic Governor Alfred E. Smith of New York for the presidency over the

successful Republican contender, Herbert C. Hoover. Hansbrough later spent a portion of his time in Maine and lived for two years on Long Island before removing once again to the nation's capital. In 1933, during the Great Depression, he published a book entitled *America's Money Tragedy*.⁵³ Shortly before his death he issued a public appeal to American farmers to support President Franklin D. Roosevelt's farm program. Hansbrough died of pneumonia in 1933 at age eighty-five.⁵⁴

Hansbrough was an early North Dakota political leader who earned a prominent role in his state's history. His three terms in the Senate coincided with a crucial transitional period as the nation was moving away from its rural and agricultural past into a republic characterized by urbanization, industrialization, and diversity. During these challenging times, Hansbrough gained attention in the upper chamber as a competent legislator. He introduced a bill, which Congress passed, to prohibit the use of the mails for lotteries. This legislation had been approved by James N. Tyner, assistant attorney general for the Post Office Department and former Congressman from Indiana. Hansbrough also sponsored a free alcohol law which President Theodore Roosevelt signed in 1907. It permitted small distillers to manufacture alcohol free of tax for denaturation. In addition Hansbrough vigorously worked for irrigation. Senator Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota, who served in the Senate from 1925 to 1945, gave Hansbrough, whom he called the "father of irrigation," the credit for irrigation development in the United States. At the time of Hansbrough's death, Nye praised his predecessor:

He was a remarkable man. In 20 years' work for a new state, and in his more recent years, he retained a freshness of spirit that found him responding to every call that he sensed as being a call to duty in the service of the country he loved.⁵⁵

Hansbrough's position in the presidential election of 1916 revealed much about the man as a politician. It reaffirmed his status as a maverick political figure committed to principle rather than a person blinded by unyielding partisanship. He put country above party. Without a political base in the state, he was free to express and write his opinions without fear of repercussion. In view of his stand that year, it was regrettable that Wilson, an intensely partisan Democrat, could not bring himself to offer Hansbrough a political appointment in his second administration.

The columns Hansbrough wrote in 1916 that appeared in various newspapers strikingly presented in a clear format his stand that year. He turned his columns into a discussion of the issues, candidates, the national political *zeitgeist*, and their relevance for North Dakota. His words became passionate philippic discourses against Hughes. Hansbrough lashed out at Hughes, Roosevelt, and

Perkins and tried to counteract their rhetoric and what he considered to be the falsehoods they were presenting to the public. These problems stemmed, in Hansbrough's view, from a misapprehension by Hughes of the country's mood and needs. Hansbrough maintained that Perkins and Roosevelt had fallen into a cesspool of political immorality and that Hughes had infected himself by associating with them and accepting their endorsements. By these actions, Hansbrough reaffirmed his fighting spirit in 1916. In one of his last written political advertisements as president of the Wilson Independent League of North Dakota, he succinctly presented his arguments for the voters prior to election day. He remarked:

Sen. Hansbrough's Column

To My Fellow Nonpartisans

This epistle is not addressed to those smug and satisfied gentlemen who sit supinely behind mahogany desks—the parasites, who produce nothing and yet take toll of everything that others produce; they are to be pitied rather than condemned. It is directed to those engaged in legitimate trade and industry—the substantial citizens who are content with the fruits of their own honest toil. The Nonpartisan League was organized as a protest against associated greed, and justly so. Its purpose is to overthrow the Wheat Ring and to give the farmer the full benefit of his own labor. To be consistent, I must vote against Candidate Hughes, who is the choice of every monopoly in the land. Elect Hughes and your proposed Elevator legislation will be declared unconstitutional.

Defeat Hughes and you will have a friend in the White House who will not pack the courts against you. Elect Hughes and you will put in the hands of monopoly a club to be used on your devoted heads. You will never have a better opportunity to put the brand of condemnation upon the trusts and monopolies that are and for years have been fattening at your expense.⁵⁶

The rise of big business generated an important transformation of American life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This growth also created the modern views of the distribution of wealth. Hansbrough's interpretation of the economic and political processes that governed the apportionment of wealth played a part in his stand in 1916. His concept of this disposition was at the heart of his understanding for an agrarian people concerned about the economic forces operating in their lives. Trustification assumed moralistic overtones in the United States because it challenged basic social assumptions.⁵⁷ Hansbrough resented monopolistic control of warehouses, processing systems, transportation, and manufacturing agencies.

Described as a liberal, Hansbrough supported Wilson for the presidency in 1916 and perhaps aided his reelection bid in North Dakota. Contrasting Wilson's

record with that of Hughes, whom he considered a twaddler, Hansbrough outlined various ideas in his newspaper columns and posted questions for North Dakotans. His main theme revolved around wealth, inequality at home, and the diplomatic role for America abroad. Hansbrough's role in 1916 provided an important aspect in understanding the campaign in the northern plains states. His conduct also revealed something about mavericks in the Progressive Era and the conditions that produced such independent behavior.⁵⁸

The 1916 election in many ways reprised Hansbrough's role as an active political representative. He relished being in the spotlight once again. Historians analyzing Hansbrough's life need to recognize that the senator's historical importance is directly tied to his public policies and actions. A great deal of biographical work still remains before Hansbrough's influence as an American political figure can be fully assessed.

Notes

¹ *The New York Times*, November 17, 1933: 19; *Fargo Forum*, November 17, 1933: 1, 8.

² *Ibid.* Also, *Minot Daily News*, November 17, 1933: 1; *Bismarck Tribune*, July 31, 1907: 4.

³ *Ibid.* Idaho and Wyoming entered the Union in 1890 during the Harrison administration.

⁴ Henry C. Hansbrough to Elijah W. Halford, August 26, 1889, Benjamin Harrison Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁵ Hansbrough to Theodore Roosevelt, August 14, 1903, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress. Hereafter, Roosevelt Papers.

⁶ Hansbrough to Republican leaders of North Dakota, April 20, 1907, Roosevelt Papers.

⁷ Hansbrough to William Loeb, Jr., May 18, 1907, Roosevelt Papers.

⁸ Hansbrough to William H. Taft, February 14, June 19, 1908, William Howard Taft Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress. Also, Charles H. Wendel, *150 Years of International Harvester* (Sarasota: Crestline, 1981): 29–31. For an account of Hansbrough's views on this subject, see Henry C. Hansbrough, *The Harvester Trust* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907).

⁹ Hansbrough to Roosevelt, August 20, 1912, Taft Papers. Hansbrough's support of Taft in 1912 placed him opposite Louis B. Hanna, a North Dakota banker and businessman who had served two terms in Congress. Hanna, the Republican governor of North Dakota from 1913 to 1917, endorsed Roosevelt in 1912. See Louis B. Hanna to Roosevelt, May 14, July 9, 1912, Roosevelt Papers.

¹⁰ Henry C. Hansbrough, *The Wreck: An Historical and a Critical Study of the Administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and of William Howard Taft* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1913): 116, 60, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 165–66.

¹² *Ibid.*: 54, 12.

¹³ Ibid.: 175, 61–62.

¹⁴ Ibid.: 83. In addition to this work, Hansbrough wrote books on other topics. See Henry C. Hansbrough, *The Second Amendment* (Minneapolis: Hudson Publishing Company, 1911); and Henry C. Hansbrough, *War and Woman: An Exposition of Man's Failure as a Harmonizer* (New York: Duffield and Company, 1915): 27.

¹⁵ Hansbrough to Taft, March 30, 1908, Taft Papers.

¹⁶ William McKinley to Hansbrough, November 19, 1900, William McKinley Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

¹⁷ Herbert Croly, "The Two Parties in 1916," *The New Republic* 8 (October 21, 1916): 286–91.

¹⁸ *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Sixteenth Republican National Convention, 1916* (3 vols.; New York: Tenny Press, 1916), 3: 1198; Gutzon Borglum to E. B. Johns, July 3, 1916, Gutzon Borglum Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress; William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: Macmillan, 1946): 521–27; Elihu Root to Charles P. Arnold, June 20, 1916, Elihu Root Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress; Roosevelt to W. A. Wadsworth, June 23, 1916, Roosevelt Papers; and Roosevelt to Frank B. Kellogg, June 21, 1916, Frank B. Kellogg Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul. Kellogg, United States Senator from Minnesota from 1917 to 1923, served as secretary of state in the Cabinet of President Calvin Coolidge from 1925 to 1929. He co-authored the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact of 1928 and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1930.

¹⁹ Vance C. McCormick to Woodrow Wilson, August 29, September 28, 1916, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress; William E. Dodd to E. M. House, November 10, 1916, Edward M. House Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut; and William Jennings Bryan to Wilson, October 8, 1916, Wilson Papers.

²⁰ Quoted in Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace, 1916–1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965): 102. See also Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910–1917* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1954): 223–51; and August Heckscher, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991): 401–18.

²¹ David Sarasohn, *The Party of Reform: Democrats in the Progressive Era* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1989): 192–238; George H. Mayer, *The Republican Party, 1854–1964* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964): 338–47; "Justice Hughes and the Presidency," *The Outlook* 112 (March 15, 1916): 602; "Hughes-Roosevelt Alliance," *The Literary Digest* 53 (July 8, 1916): 56–57; and "Hughes or Wilson?" *The New Republic* 8 (October 28, 1916): 311–13.

²² Information on the presidential election of 1916 can be gleaned from Merlo J. Pusey, *Charles Evans Hughes* (2 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1951), 1: 315–66; and S. D. Lovell, *The Presidential Election of 1916* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980).

²³ *The New York Times*, August 11, 1916: 1.

²⁴ *The New York Times*, September 13, 1916: 3. Also, *Grand Forks Herald*, September 16, 1916: 8.

²⁵ Taft to Gus J. Karger, June 20, 1916; Taft to Charles Evans Hughes, June 12, 1916, Taft Papers.

²⁶ *Grand Forks Herald*, October 4, 1916: 1.

- ²⁷ Quoted in *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, October 5, 1916: 4.
- ²⁸ *Grand Forks Herald*, October 16, 1916: 7–8.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, October 17, 1916: 1. McCumber and Hansbrough consented to meet again later at Grand Forks.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, October 22, 1916: 6.
- ³¹ *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, October 29, 1916: 1.
- ³² *Devils Lake Daily Journal*, October 30, 1916: 6.
- ³³ *Beach Advance* [Golden Valley County], October 25, 1916: 4, among others.
- ³⁴ *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, October 29, 1916: 13.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ See George W. Perkins to Hughes, July 19, August 3, September 6, 1916, George W. Perkins Papers, Columbia University Library, New York. Also, Perkins to Hughes, July 14, 1916, Charles Evans Hughes Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress.
- ³⁷ *Grand Forks Herald*, October 22, 1916: 6.
- ³⁸ *Devils Lake Daily Journal*, November 4, 1916: 4.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, October 25, 1916: 5.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, October 18, 1916: 7.
- ⁴¹ *Jamestown Daily Alert*, October 28, 1916: 4.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, October 31, 1916: 4.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, October 27, 1916: 4.
- ⁴⁴ Wilson to J. W. Wasson, October 31, 1916, Wilson Papers.
- ⁴⁵ *The New York Times*, November 8, 1916: 1; Hiram Johnson to Roosevelt, November 25, 1916, Roosevelt Papers; Kendrick A. Clements, *The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992): 134; and Carolyn Goldinger (ed.), *Presidential Elections Since 1789*, 4th ed. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1987): 115.
- ⁴⁶ *Devils Lake Daily Journal*, November 7, 8, 1916: 1; *Cavalier Chronicle*, November 10, 1916: 1; and *Jamestown Daily Alert*, November 10, 1916: 1. Allan L. Benson, an editor and author, obtained 5,716 votes in North Dakota as the Socialist party's presidential contender in 1916.
- ⁴⁷ *Fargo Forum*, December 8, 1916: 4. In foreign affairs, Hansbrough recognized that the essence of the isolationist illusion was a denial of reality. He refused to peddle a narrow-minded nationalism that excluded any concept of enlightened self-interest.
- ⁴⁸ *Grand Forks Herald*, November 5, 1916: 1, 4, among others. See also "Verdict of the People," *The North American Review* 204 (December, 1916): 370–84.
- ⁴⁹ John A. Garraty, *Right-Hand Man: The Life of George W. Perkins* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1960): 355–57.
- ⁵⁰ Taft to Hughes, November 10, 1916, Hughes Papers.
- ⁵¹ Hughes to Taft, November 20, 1916, Taft Papers.
- ⁵² John E. Diamond to Knute Nelson, August 23, 1916, Knute Nelson Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
- ⁵³ Henry C. Hansbrough, *America's Money Tragedy* (Washington: B. G. Lubore, 1933). 32
- ⁵⁴ *The New York Times*, November 17, 1933: 19; *Grand Forks Herald*, November 17, 1933: 1, 6. Senator Hansbrough was twice married, the first time to Josephine E. Orr, of Newburg, New York, in 1879, who died in 1895, and a second time in 1897 to Mary

B. Chapman, of Washington, a widely known writer and artist. He had no children.

⁵⁵ *Bismarck Tribune*, November 17, 1933: 1.

⁵⁶ *Devils Lake Daily Journal*, November 4, 1916: 4.

⁵⁷ See William Letwin, *Law and Economic Policy in America: The Evolution of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act* (New York: Random House, 1965): 69–70; Alfred D. Chandler, "The Beginnings of 'Big Business' in American Industry," *Business History Review* 33 (Spring, 1959): 1–31.

⁵⁸ Additional information on this subject can be obtained from Robert P. Wilkins, "Referendum on War? The General Election of 1916 in North Dakota," *North Dakota History* 36 (Fall, 1969): 296–335; Z. H. Austin to Thomas J. Walsh, November 8, 1916, Samuel White to Walsh, November 15, 1916, Thomas J. Walsh Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress; Edward C. Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel: The Public Life of William Lemke* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963); William M. Leary, Jr., "Woodrow Wilson, Irish-Americans, and the Election of 1916," *Journal of American History* 54 (June, 1967): 57–72; Robert Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform: A Study of the Progressive Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); Thomas J. Kerr IV, "German-Americans and Neutrality in the 1916 Election," *Mid-America* 43 (April, 1961): 95–103; Meyer Nathan, "The Election of 1916 in the Middle West" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1966); Charles N. Glaab, "The Failure of North Dakota Progressivism," *Mid-America* 39 (July, 1957): 180–91; Lewis L. Gould, *Reform and Regulation: American Politics from Roosevelt to Wilson, 1900–1916* (2d ed.; New York: McGraw, 1986); John Burke to John Andrews, March 21, 1916, John Burke Papers, Orin G. Libby Historical Manuscripts Collection, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks; *Williston Herald*, June 8, 1916: 1; Porter J. McCumber to William Lemke, August 7, 1916, William Lemke Papers, Libby Collection, Fritz Library, University of North Dakota; *Hettinger Adams County Record*, October 10, 1916; Ralph D. Cole to Knute Nelson, September 14, 1916, Knute Nelson Papers; Burke to William Jennings Bryan, August 4, 1916, Burke Papers; Samuel C. Torgerson to Wilson, September 12, 1916, Torgerson to Richard Hooker, October 21, 1916, Samuel C. Torgerson Papers, University of North Dakota; *Fargo Nonpartisan Leader*, November 2, 1916: 1; and the *Fargo Forum*, October 20, 1916: 1.